

**WELCOME REMARKS BY
A/PROF JOHN LIM, CEO, HEALTH SCIENCES AUTHORITY
AT THE 10TH WORLD BLOOD DONOR DAY
8 JUNE 2013**

Mr Teo Ser Luck, Minister of State, Ministry of Trade and Industry and Mayor, North East District

Assoc Prof Muhammad Faishal Ibrahim, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Health & Ministry of Transport

Mr Nicholas Fang and Mr Ramasamy Dhinakaran, Nominated Members of Parliament

Mr Tee Tua Ba, Chairman of Singapore Red Cross

Mr Benjamin William, Secretary General, Singapore Red Cross

Blood donors and blood mobile organisers

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning and a very warm welcome to the celebration of the 10th World Blood Donor Day.

2. During this period every year, countries around the world celebrate World Blood Donor Day to raise awareness of the need for safe blood and blood products, and to thank all blood donors for their selfless giving to save lives. The World Health Organisation's focus for this year's World Blood Donor day is the promotion of voluntary unpaid blood donation. This is a philosophy that both the Singapore Red Cross and the Health Sciences Authority have strongly adhered to over the years as the best way to ensure a safe and sustainable blood supply.

3. I would like to specially thank our champion donors who voluntarily and regularly donate blood. You are truly the lifeline for many patients, giving them hope and the gift of life. I would also like to congratulate the mobile organisers who tirelessly organise blood drives. Your commitments and efforts help ensure a consistent supply of blood for those in need.

4. Over the years, we have seen the demand for blood continue to increase. From 2002 to 2012, blood usage rose by more than 50%. Over the next 10 to 20 years, blood demand is projected to soar. This is due to our growing and rapidly aging population, an expanding network of hospitals to meet our healthcare needs, and new treatment protocols requiring intensive blood support.

5. In recent years, infectious diseases have continued to emerge and evolve with potentially grave consequences on public health. Increasing air travel has also contributed to the regional and global spread of infectious diseases. All these impact the safety and adequacy of our national blood supply as it affects the eligibility of people to donate.

6. Our policy of voluntary non-remunerated donations is a key pillar for ensuring the safety of our national blood supply. It recognizes that all of us have complex motivations as human beings. Whenever tangible or material incentives are offered in relation to an altruistic act like blood donation, it can influence behavior and lead to a person withholding vital information on his or her medical, social or travel history. This can have a significant impact on blood safety because even with all our stepped up laboratory testing of blood over the years, there are still “window periods” when tests may not pick up the presence of transmissible infections in the initial stages. Today’s World Blood Donor Day is therefore an important occasion for us to recognise the invaluable contributions of our altruistic blood donors to the National Blood Programme, who offer the gift of life without expectation of receiving anything in kind. But we should certainly not hold back in acknowledging your contributions on celebratory occasions like this.

7. As a scientific organisation, HSA's Blood Services Group adopts the best international practices and benchmarks in line with leading blood services and international accreditation bodies. This is important to ensure that our processes are of world-class standards and we keep abreast of the emerging threats and challenges facing our national blood supply.

8. In our relentless pursuit of blood safety, BSG's laboratories use the best available testing technologies to screen every unit of blood collected for infectious diseases such as the HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and Syphilis. We have also implemented Malaria screening tests for blood donations from donors who have travelled to malaria-endemic areas. Through this new screening protocol, we not only enhance blood safety but also enable more donors to step forward and help patients who need transfusions. Moving forward, we will continue to explore new and sound techniques to further enhance the safety of our blood supply.

9. In closing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our valued partner, the Singapore Red Cross Society, for their strong support as the National Blood Donor Recruiter for the National Blood Programme. Over the past 12 years, the Red Cross and HSA have established a strong partnership that has been cited by WHO and others as a model of cooperation which is being promoted to other countries. Our common objective is to ensure an adequate supply of safe blood to patients in Singapore, based on voluntary blood donation.

10. Once again, I would like to thank our blood donors for giving the precious gift of life, as well as our Guest of Honour, special guests and everyone present for taking the time to spend this significant day with us.

11. Thank you.